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THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE MODERN EGYPTIANS
BY E. W. LANE

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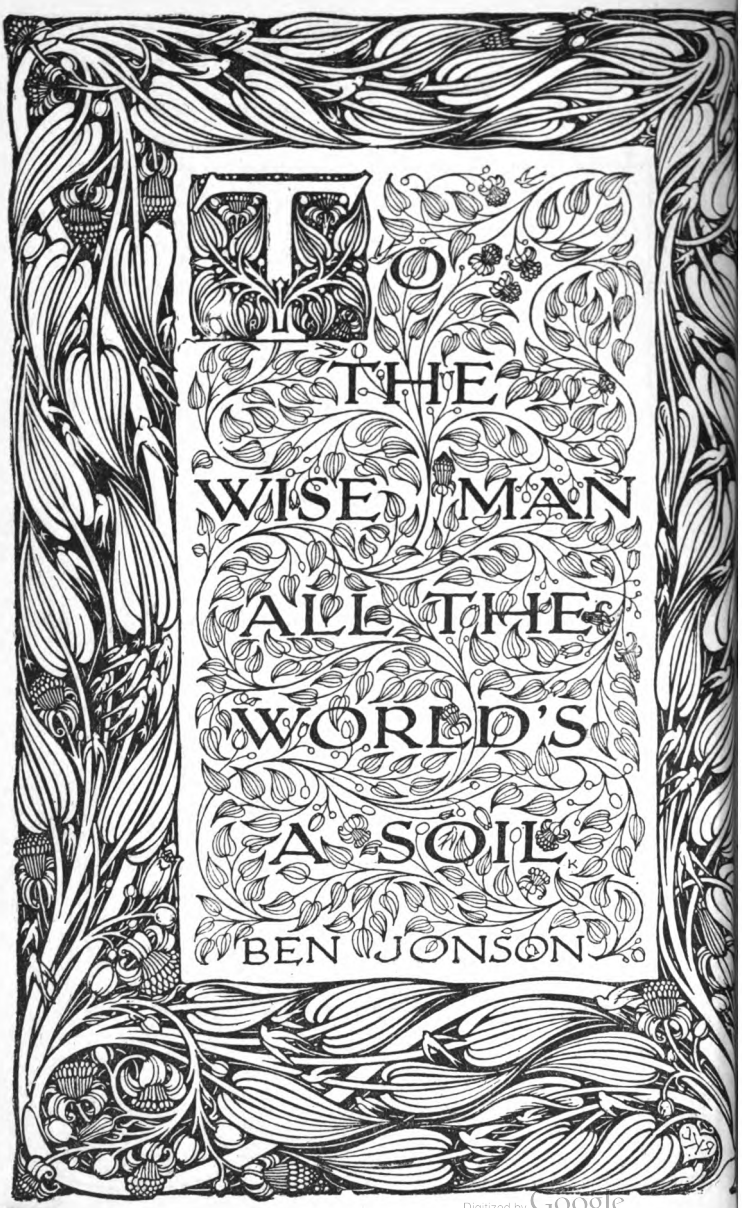


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The MANNERS & CUSTOMS of the MODERN EGYPTIANS by EDWARD WILLIAM LANE



LONDON & TORONTO
PUBLISHED BY J·M·DENT
& SONS LTD & IN NEW YORK
BY E·P·DUTTON & CO

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First Issue of this Edition . 1908
Reprinted 1914, 1917, 1923

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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of the length of the boat. In most of these boats, the cabin is divided into two or more apartments. Sudden whirlwinds and squalls being very frequent on the Nile, a boatman is usually employed to hold the main-sheet in his hand, that he may be able to let it fly at a moment's notice: the traveller should be especially careful with respect to this precaution, however light the wind.

CHAPTER XV

USE OF TOBACCO, COFFEE, HEMP, OPIUM, ETC.

THE interdiction of wine, and other fermented and intoxicating liquors, which is one of the most important laws in the code of El-Islám, has caused the greater number of the disciples of this faith to become immoderately addicted to other means of inducing slight intoxication, or different kinds of pleasurable excitement.

The most prevalent means, in most Muslim countries, of exciting what the Arabs term "keyf," which I cannot more nearly translate than by the term "placid enjoyment," is tobacco. It appears that tobacco was introduced into Turkey, Arabia, and other countries of the East, shortly before the beginning of the seventeenth century of the Christian era:[1] that is, not many years after it had begun to be regularly imported into Western Europe, as an article of commerce, from America. Its lawfulness to the Muslim has often been warmly disputed;[2] but is now generally allowed. In the character of the Turks and Arabs who have become addicted to its use, it has induced considerable changes, particularly rendering them more inactive than they were in earlier times; leading them to waste, over the pipe, many hours which might

[1] El-Is-ḥákee states that the custom of smoking tobacco began to be common in Egypt between the years of the Flight 1010 and 1012 (A.D. 1601 and 1603).

[2] El-Gabartee relates, that about a century ago, in the time of Moḥammad Báshà El-Yedekshee (or Yedekchee), who governed Egypt in the years of the Flight 1156–8, it frequently happened that when a man was found with a pipe in his hand in Cairo, he was made to eat the bowl with its burning contents. This may seem incredible; but a pipe-bowl *may* be broken by strong teeth. The tobacco first used in the East was probably very strong.

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be profitably employed: but it has had another and a better effect; that of superseding, in a great measure, the use of wine, which, to say the least, is very injurious to the health of the inhabitants of hot climates. In the tales of 'The Thousand and One Nights,' which were written before the introduction of tobacco into the East, and which we may confidently receive as presenting faithful pictures of the state of Arabian manners and customs at the period when they appeared, we have abundant evidence that wine was much more commonly and more openly drunk by Muslims of that time, or of the age immediately preceding, than it is by those of the present day. It may further be remarked, in the way of apology for the pipe, as employed by the Turks and Arabs, that the mild kinds of tobacco generally used by them have a very gentle effect; they calm the nervous system, and, instead of stupefying, sharpen the intellect. The pleasures of Eastern society are certainly much heightened by the pipe, and it affords the peasant a cheap and sober refreshment, and probably often restrains him from less innocent indulgences.

The cup of coffee, which, when it can be afforded, generally accompanies the pipe, is commonly regarded as an almost equal luxury, and doubtless conduced with tobacco to render the use of wine less common among the Arabs: its name, "ḳahweh," an old Arabic term for wine, strengthens this supposition. It is said that the discovery of the refreshing beverage afforded by the berry of the coffee-plant was made in the latter part of the seventh century of the Flight (or, of the thirteenth of the Christian era), by a certain devotee named the sheykh 'Omar, who, driven by persecution to a mountain of El-Yemen, with a few of his disciples, was induced, by the want of provisions, to make an experiment of the decoction of coffee-berries, as an article of food; the coffee-plant being there a spontaneous production. It was not, however, till about two centuries after this period that the use of coffee began to become common in El-Yemen. It was imported into Egypt between the years 900 and 910 of the Flight (towards the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century of our era, or about a century before the introduction of tobacco into the East), and was then drunk in the great mosque El-Azhar, by the faḳeers of El-Yemen and Mekkeh and El-Medeeneh, who found it very refreshing to them while engaged in their exercises of reciting prayers, and the praises of God, and freely indulged themselves with it. About half a century after,

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it was introduced into Constantinople.[1] In Arabia, in Egypt, and in Constantinople, it was often the subject of sharp disputes among the pious and learned; many doctors asserting that it possessed intoxicating qualities, and was, therefore, an unlawful beverage to Muslims; while others contended that, among many other virtues, it had that of repelling sleep, which rendered it a powerful help to the pious in their nocturnal devotions: according to the fancy of the ruling power, its sale was therefore often prohibited and again legalized. It is now, and has been for many years, acknowledged as lawful by almost all the Muslims, and is immoderately used even by the Wahhábees, who are the most rigid in their condemnation of tobacco, and in their adherence to the precepts of the Ḳur-án, and the Traditions of the Prophet. Formerly, it was generally prepared from the berries and husks together; and it is still so prepared, or from the husks alone, by many persons in Arabia. In other countries of the East, it is prepared from the berries alone, freshly roasted and pounded.

Cairo contains above a thousand "Ḳahwehs,"[2] or coffee-shops. The ḳahweh is, generally speaking, a small apartment, whose front, which is towards the street, is of open wooden work, in the form of arches.[3] Along the front, except before the door, is (or was) a "maṣṭabah," or raised seat, of stone or brick, two or three feet in height, and about the same in width, which is covered with matting; and there are similar seats in the interior, on two or three sides. The coffee-shops are most frequented in the afternoon and evening; but by few except persons of the lower orders, and tradesmen. The exterior maṣṭabah is generally preferred. Each person brings with him his own tobacco and pipe. Coffee is served by the "ḳahwegee" (or attendant of the shop), at the price of five faḍḍahs a cup, or ten for a little "bekreg" (or pot) of three or four cups.[4] The ḳahwegee also keeps two or three nárgeelehs or sheeshehs, and gózehs,[5] which latter are used for smoking both the tumbák (or Persian tobacco) and the ḥasheesh (or hemp); for ḥasheesh is sold at some coffee-shops.

[1] See De Sacy's 'Chrestomathie Arabe,' vol. i pp. 412–483, 2nd ed.

[2] "Ḳahweh," being the name of the *beverage* sold at the coffee-shop, is hence applied to the shop itself.

[3] See an engraving accompanying Chapter XXI.

[4] A decoction of ginger, sweetened with sugar, is likewise often sold at the Ḳahwehs, particularly on the nights of festivals.

[5] These instruments have been described in a former chapter.

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Musicians and story-tellers frequent some of the ḳahwehs; particularly on the evenings of religious festivals.

The leaves and capsules of hemp, called, in Egypt, "ḥasheesh," were employed in some countries of the East in very ancient times to induce an exhilarating intoxication. Herodotus (lib. iv. cap. 75) informs us that the Scythians had a custom of burning the seeds of this plant, in religious ceremonies, and that they became intoxicated with the fumes. Galen also mentions the intoxicating properties of hemp. The practice of chewing the leaves of this plant to induce intoxication prevailed, or existed, in India, in very early ages: thence it was introduced into Persia; and about six centuries ago (before the middle of the thirteenth century of our era) this pernicious and degrading custom was adopted in Egypt, but chiefly by persons of the lower orders; though several men eminent in literature and religion, and vast numbers of faḳeers (or poor devotees), yielded to its fascinations, and contended that it was lawful to the Muslim. The habit is now very common among the lower orders in the metropolis and other towns of Egypt. There are various modes of preparing it; and various names, as "sheerà,"[1] "bast," &c., are given to its different preparations. Most commonly, I am told, the young leaves are used alone, or mixed with tobacco, for smoking; and the capsules, without the seeds, pounded and mixed with several aromatic substances for an intoxicating conserve. Acids counteract its operation. The preparation of hemp used for smoking generally produces boisterous mirth. Few inhalations of its smoke, but the last very copious, are usually taken from the gózeh. After the emission of the last draught, from the mouth and nostrils, commonly a fit of coughing, and often a spitting of blood, ensues, in consequence of the lungs having been filled with the smoke. Ḥasheesh is to be obtained not only at some of the coffee-shops: there are shops of a smaller and more private description solely appropriated to the sale of this and other intoxicating preparations: they are called "maḥsheshehs." It is sometimes amusing to observe the ridiculous conduct, and to listen to the conversation, of the persons who frequent these shops. They are all of the lower orders. The term "ḥashshásh," which signifies "a smoker, or an eater, of hemp," is an appellation of obloquy: noisy and riotous people are often called "ḥashsháśheen," which is the plural of that appellation, and the origin of our word "assassin;" a

[1] Or "sheereh."

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name first applied to Arab warriours in Syria, in the time of the Crusades, who made use of intoxicating and soporific drugs in order to render their enemies insensible.[1]

The use of opium and other drugs to induce intoxication is not so common in Egypt as in many other countries of the East: the number of Egyptians addicted to this vice is certainly not nearly so great, in proportion to the whole population, as is the relative number of persons in our own country who indulge in habitual drunkenness. Opium is called, in Arabic, "afiyoon;" and the opium-eater, "afiyoonee." This latter appellation is a term of less obloquy than that of "ḥashshásh," because there are many persons of the middle and higher classes to whom it is applicable. In its crude state, opium is generally taken, by those who have not long been addicted to its use, in the dose of three or four grains, for the purpose above mentioned; but the "afiyoonee" increases the dose by degrees. The Egyptians make several conserves composed of hellebore, hemp, and opium, and several aromatic drugs, which are more commonly taken than the simple opium. A conserve of this nature is called "maagoon;" and the person who makes or sells it, "maagungee." The most common kind is called "barsh." There is one kind which, it is said, makes the person who takes it manifest his pleasure by singing; another which will make him chatter; a third which excites to dance; a fourth which particularly affects the vision, in a pleasurable manner; a fifth which is simply of a sedative nature. These are sold at the "maḥshesheh."

The fermented and intoxicating liquor called "boozeh," or "booẓah," which is drunk by many of the boatmen of the Nile, and by other persons of the lower orders in Egypt, has been mentioned in a former chapter. I have seen, in tombs at Thebes, many large jars containing the dregs of beer of this kind prepared from barley.

[1] See, on this subject, the close of Chapter XXII. A reviewer seems to have inferred from the remark above, that I took to myself the credit of discovering this derivation. A reference to the words "Assassin" and "De Sacy" in the Index would have shewn that this was not the case. I thought the observation of the illustrious De Sacy respecting this word to be too generally known to require my mentioning it in *two* places.

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